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ABSTRACT

The historical development and future goals of a UNESCO project to establish a network of educational systems throughout Central America are described. In 1975, the project began to search for solutions to social, economic, and educational development problems in the region. Objectives of the project are to conduct a critical analysis of the socioeconomic situation in relation to educational needs in each subregion; provide support for renewal of formal and nonformal learning processes by developing curricular innovation; and train technical, administrative, and teaching personnel according to new educational and administrative trends. The project sought to organize technical and human resources within the formal educational systems, design entry points within the systems which emphasize the role of decision-making centers, train national specialists, and make available the resources of the systems to solve rural underdevelopment and underemployment. Other activities included curriculum development, identification of socioeconomic indicators for educational planning, and research on the position of organized groups in Central America regarding educational systems. In its next phase, the project will focus on putting results of research and program development into practice. (KC)

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The Network of Educational Systems for Development in Central America and Panama Project
1975-1979

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An experiment in technical co-operation among countries

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FOREWORD

Since 1973, in accordance with resolutions adopted at successive sessions of the General Conference, Unesco has taken various measures to establish networks for educational innovation in Asia and Oceania, Africa, Europe, the Arab States and Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Project for the establishment of a network of educational systems for development in Central America and Panama was initiated in 1975, in response to a request from the six participating countries to Unesco and UNDP for technical assistance in establishing a system of mutual co-operation within the framework of the Central American Educational Co-ordination Office (CEC).

In the five years of the Project's existence, a whole series of activities has been developed covering research, training and technical exchanges; these activities have been mainly concerned with priority problems and have sought to ensure a more effective contribution by education to the social and economic development of the countries of the region. Furthermore, over 500 administrators, researchers, teachers and social workers have participated in working groups, studies, seminars and workshops on a variety of activities and topics, such as the nuclear planning of education, joint research into basic educational needs, socio-economic indicators, in-service training for teachers throughout their careers, the training of educational administrators, short courses, vocational training and socio-educational information.

This document gives a brief description of the historical development of the Project, from the conceptual and the operational points of view, so that it may serve as an example - of achievements to be emulated and of errors to be avoided - for future activities of a similar nature.

1. Background

The Project for the establishment of the network of educational systems for development in Central America and Panama was initiated in 1975 as a contribution to the search for solutions to the problem of the social, economic and educational development of the region. The serious structural difficulties of the region were reflected in inadequate rural development, very low income levels, unemployment, underemployment, high illiteracy rates and poor levels of education, coupled with great inequality in respect of opportunities, employment and housing, health care, education and culture.

This situation provided the impetus for two closely related schemes: Central American Educational Co-ordination (CEC), an intergovernmental system of mutual co-ordination and co-operation, which was also established in 1975 (in Guatemala) by the Ministers of Education of the region, and the present "Network" Project, assisted technically and financially by Unesco and UNDP, the general objective of which was to contribute to the democratization and the quantitative and qualitative improvement of education, precisely through the establishment of a network of mutual support between governmental and non-governmental sectors and institutions in a position to contribute to the development of education in each country in the subregion.

The Project has the following specific objectives:

to conduct a critical analysis of the socio-economic situation in the subregion and its relation to education, including an analysis of the basic needs of the rural population by means of macro-social research based on participatory methods and techniques;

to provide support for the renewal of formal and non-formal learning processes by developing and introducing curricular innovations in keeping with the various educational contexts;

to re-align educational planning in the light of administrative decentralization and the renewal of learning processes, and to analyse the relation between the labour market and education;

to train technical, administrative and teaching personnel along lines in accordance with new educational and administrative trends (regionalization).

The Central American Educational Co-ordination Office (CEC), with its multilateral Technical Commission and National Commissions, constitutes a framework for institutional co-operation within which the Project provides technical assistance in respect of priority problems indicated by the participating countries, either directly or through CEC. Programmes are carried out by the countries themselves, through national or subregional institutions and by means of activities at national or regional level. At the same time Project activities are co-ordinated, in order to ensure systematic, reciprocal co-operation, with those of other projects in receipt of technical assistance from Unesco, UNDP, Unicef and IBRD, and with Unesco's Regular Programme operations in the area. This co-ordination makes it possible for the Project to make available to the participating countries the combined technical assistance constribution from a variety of sources, within and outside the subregion. What is more, it helps to develop a common school of thought as regards education and educational methods in Central America, along three main lines:

education considered in conjunction with a critical analysis of the socio-economic situation in the region;

the renewal of formal and non-formal learning processes;

the planning and decentralized administration of education systems.

2. Education in Central America and the social, economic and cultural problems of the region from the standpoint of the Network Project

The starting-points for the technical analyses carried out jointly by experts from Unesco and the participating countries, on the basis of which the Project was designed and developed were as follows:

an awareness of the grave social, economic and cultural problems of the societies of the region; and

a clear insight into the role of education, which, without actually being regarded as the driving force in achieving the changes urgently required by the least privileged populations of the region, can have a broadly decisive influence as one of the variables intervening in such changes.

The range of problems affecting Central American societies have been studied exhaustively, not only in their particular aspects (population, health, nutrition, income distribution, education, etc.), but also as regards the way in which each of these

aspects fits into a general framework that accounts for the great inequalities which they all reflect.(1)

In the light of all these considerations, therefore, the Project proceeded on the basis of the following assumptions:

the problems faced by Central American societies can be reduced basically to the issue of rural development (low incomes, unemployment and underemployment, poor levels of education, etc.). Their solution necessarily depends on the approach adopted in regard to the agrarian question, namely the structure and dynamics of the agricultural sector in each of the six countries and its links with the international economic system;

although, for the reasons stated above, there are marked imbalances at the national level between town and country, there are still greater imbalances and inequalities in the rural areas in the six countries as regards the living standards of population groups (e.g. access to work, equal opportunities, public health services, housing, education and culture, and participation in decisions affecting the individual). Hence the importance of identifying problem areas and groups in Central America which are crucial from the socio-economic, cultural and educational points of view, that is to say areas in which inequalities and imbalances are compounded in all sectors.

This can be illustrated by a few figures:

the inhabitants of the rural areas, in which more than 60 per cent of the population of the region live, receive less than 15 per cent of total national revenue;(2)

in 1970, the combined rate of unconcealed unemployment and underemployment represented 44 per cent of the working population in the agricultural sector;

more than 70 per cent of children suffer from malnutrition, with infant mortality exceeding 60 per 1,000;

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(1) The reader is referred in particular to the studies by CSUCA, SIECA and ECLA as regards the overall picture, and to the sectoral indicators prepared by ILO-PREALC, FAO, WHO, Unicef, Unesco, etc. From the start of its activities the Network Project has sought to further study the problem as a whole, through its preparatory work for the first Regional Conference on Education and Development (November 1977, Guatemala), organized by CEC. See in particular the following documents:

W. Harth - J.B. Bernède: Consideraciones cualitativas y cuantitativas del papel de la educación en el desarrollo rural de los países de Centro América y Panamá. Guatemala, September 1977. CRED 3.
Proyecto RED-CEC-Gobiernos del área: Datos e indicadores socioeconómicos para el área.
Educación y desarrollo rural. Serie 1, Monografías por países, June 1978.

(2) With very marked extremes of poverty in these majority groups (in the department of Quiché, Guatemala, 20 per cent of rural families have an income of less than $100 a year).

the lack of collective organization, as exemplified by the very limited trade union membership of the working population in nearly all Central American countries, particularly of workers in rural areas, who account for the majority of the working population, means that there is minimal participation by the people in decisions which affect them, especially as regards socio-economic development and regional integration.

From the educational point of view, the quantitative picture is no more encouraging; it simply confirms the general pattern of inequality in Central American societies, in particular the fact that educational imbalances coincide with those found in other sectors. This is obvious from the following data:

high illiteracy rates, amounting to 50 per cent or more of the total population in four out of the six countries (source: ECLA), with very great differences between areas and groups and extremes of up to 90 per cent in the least privileged population groups (indigenous population departments of Guatemala);

with the relative exception of Costa Rica and Panama, the average enrolment ratio for the primary-school age population is low, particularly in rural areas: in Guatemala, 53.9 per cent in towns and 36.1 per cent in rural areas;(1) in Nicaragua, 57.8 per cent in towns and 32.2 per cent in rural areas(2);

over and above the fact that retention in primary education is, as a rule low, reflecting considerable disparties according to the district and the group, the general level of education is very poor, particularly in rural areas;

vocational training and out-of-school education are on a very limited scale;

a study of public expenditure on the education sector in the six countries shows the lack of priority still accorded in some of the countries of the region to the development of education (so much so that in one country the proportion of expenditure in relation to total public expenditure has been halved in ten years).

In view of this situation - and without underestimating the financial effort in the education sector that every country would be called upon to make as a matter of priority - the Project set itself the aim of identifying the factors which affected, in all six countries alike, though in varying degrees, the quantitative and qualitative shortfall between the performance of the formal education system and the barely developed non-formal system, and the needs, problems and interests of the least privileged groups in Central American societies. Concurrently, the Project has always sought to identify groups of projects and educational activities in the region which by reason of their form, procedures or content, are of an innovative nature.

Looking more closely at the negative side of the picture, attention should be drawn to the following features:

in the rural areas more especially, where the needs are most acute, and with the exception of a few isolated experiments, education systems are factors which perpetuate the socio-economic inequalities between areas and population groups. This is not simply the result of material inequalities, but is due primarily to the fact that the education provided is devised, programmed and imparted without any participation by the people concerned, or any reference to their endemic socio-economic problems;

(1) Figures for 1973.
(2) Figures for 1972.

out-of-school education (sponsored by ministries of education and other ministries such as health, agriculture and labour) is not only very limited in extent, but also suffers from serious conceptual limitations, since its programmes relate to development objectives (mainly of short-term benefit to the national economy, but without any redistribution of the revenue thus created), and make no attempt to assist students or needy peasants to learn how to use their critical faculties, and thus to become aware of the structural factors which lie at the root of their everyday problems.

In particular, it should be noted that:

initial teacher-training, which opens up new academic and cultural horizons, tends to foster the movement of teachers from the country to urban areas, regardless of the lack of training programmes to prepare them for their new surroundings;

curricula continue to be prepared on the basis of subjects which have such little practical relevance to the socio-economic context that it is difficult to adapt the content of programmes to the variety of geographical, economic, social, cultural and technological situations of the people concerned;

furthermore, many possible educational innovations have their origin in non-governmental groups, which often fail to produce the desired impact or establish the necessary contact with the State, either because they are isolated or lack resources, or because of ideological differences with the leadership;

lastly, educational administrations in Central America and Panama - partly on account of overdependence on recruiting administrators from the teaching sector, and partly for lack of training - are not equipped to handle the modern management instruments and techniques which would produce the more flexible and rapid results required if education is to have its roots at the level of the people concerned (decentralization of decision-making, administration by objectives and by programmes, etc.).

On the positive side, educational projects, groups and institutions exist in the area, or have been established in the course of the Project, which represent a capital of acquired experience - even if not always consolidated or correlated - and which hold out hopes for possible educational alternatives for development.

Examples are:

national programmes for out-of-school education, in Honduras and Guatemala;

the programmes of cultural centres in El Salvador, and of health workers in Costa Rica;

special training programmes in curriculum development and educational technology at the Francisco Morazán Higher Teacher Training College, in Honduras;

nuclear planning programmes in Honduras, Guatemala and Panama (basic production cycles);

bilingual "promotores" in Guatemala;

further teacher training in study groups, in El Salvador and Panama;

the training given in the co-operatives of the Reforma Agraria, Honduras;

vocational training, on a modular basis, provided by the Instituto Nacional de Aprendizaje (INA), Costa Rica;

various experiments carried out by State or private universities which are members of the Higher Council of Central American Universities (CSUCA) or the Federation of Private Universities of Central America (FUPAC), with a view to making their training and research activities more relevant to the social and economic problems of the countries of the subregion;

the courses, research and advisory activities of the Central American Institute of Educational Administration and Supervision (ICASE), at the University of Panama;

the studies and surveys conducted and published by non-governmental centres such as CEASPA, CELA, ICASE (Panama), CSUCA (Costa Rica), IHDER (Honduras) and UCA (El Salvador and Nicaragua).

A feature common to all the above activities is that they have broken the exclusive control traditionally exerted by ministries of education over national and local education, and that action has been taken jointly with the various "development agencies" (health, agriculture, housing, etc.) working in the field. In this way, a system has evolved in support of the various learning processes so that the rural populations may have the opportunity of making experiments and reaping the benefits in their everyday life.

3. The original conceptual basis of the Project

With all these sources of innovation existing side by side in the region at the time when the Network Project began to take shape, and the re-establishment of multilateral contacts between educators and local education authorities, those responsible for the Project (CEC and Unesco) were faced with a series of questions which contributed to the working out of the original conceptual basis for the Project:

If education is to be integrated in overall development processes, does not this presuppose the search for "education-oriented situations", which will involve people in these processes and help them to become active participants therein?

In such situations, should not advantage be taken of the timing and content of plans for developing production in rural areas, and the productive capacity of their inhabitants (the introduction of new crops, experiments with new fertilizers, agricultural loans, the construction of new housing, wells, etc.) as a stimulus to learning and a source of educational content?

If democratization is postulated as one of the main goals of education in Central America, it is obvious that educational structures and programme contents, with their characteristic design ("open", "closed", "linear", "integrated", etc.) play a decisive part in advancing or blocking reforms. Is it not therefore a fact that the democratization of education is conditional on the broadening and diversification of learning opportunities at all stages of life, these opportunities being distributed among open, (and also diversified) education systems, and use being made of the educational networks which exist at the local level and are specific to organized social groups, such as rural trade unions, co-operative movements, and so on?

Bearing in mind the importance of developing out-of-school education in the region and also, in the context of lifelong education, of ensuring the dovetailing of school education with out-of-school studies, whether formal or non-formal, surely there is a need to develop a methodology of integral curriculum development which will break down the artificial administrative and institutional barriers that at present fragment the education of the individual in all circumstances, and at every stage in his life?

Is it not the case that an effort of this kind requires the inclusion in multi-sectoral and multidisciplinary teams of technicians from other sectors (health, agriculture, etc.), and of those who have been involved in or have experience of out-of-school learning processes, these teams being genuinely decentralized in terms of independent action and decision-making?

If a key component in the renewal of the education system is the introduction of radical changes in the present systems for the recruitment, pre- and in-service training of teachers and educational experts and administrators, should not methodologies and forms of training for such personnel be devised which will be imbued with the same operational principles as those governing the renewal of formal education, that is to say flexibility and adaptability in respect of both initial and lifelong training?

Taking as a basis all the experiments described above, how can one define a strategy for out-of-school education programmes in relation to the groups concerned, the areas selected, the social and economic changes sought, and the organized groups and development projects which lend support to these programmes? Above all, who should take the decisions in formulating the policy for out-of-school activities? What responsibility for decision-making and for action devolves upon the organized groups representative of the students in out-of-school activities?

In view of the danger that any system promoted by the State or a centralized body will become bureaucratic, how can we ensure that such activities will not be defined solely on the basis of criteria which are irrelevant to the interests of students (for example, the economic interests of ruling groups, administrative or functional criteria specific to central government bodies, etc.)? How can the qualifications required, the sources of recruitment and types of training for out-of-school education workers, instructors or "promotores" be defined, not in terms of the skills they will teach, but of their understanding of and adaptability to the learning situations in which they will have to act, and the groups with which they will work? In particular, how can we make sure that education workers will provide effective support for the educational solutions devised by those concerned, in learning situations chosen by themselves? How can we prevent these workers from being merely mouthpieces conveying messages prepared in central administrative offices, in respect of learning situations which are irrelevant to the people concerned? To what extent do out-of-school education programmes meet the needs, not only of individuals, but also of organized groups (trade unions, community groups, co-operatives, etc.)? What structural machinery should be provided for interaction and communication between, on the one hand, the groups which are responsible for identifying the learning situations of their members and for the development of their educational activities, and on the other, the central State and professional structures which can provide support and technical assistance to such activities in the context of national planning?

As regards the education systems, in their entirety, how can links be established between school and out-of-school systems so that the student can re-enter the formal system whenever he considers it necessary for the exercise of his occupation or in order to improve his prospects?

4. Solutions provided by the Network Project in the course of its development (1975-1979)

This overall survey, prepared during the first year of the Project, served as a starting-point from which to achieve its initial objective, which was to facilitate co-operation through the introduction into the participating countries, and by them, of a blueprint for education in Central America based on existing institutions and current activities in the region. It was also used to determine the strategy for the Project, along the following main lines:

(i) The organized use of the technical and human resources available within the formal education systems of the region, and their acquired capital of innovative experiments, through the establishment of a network of inter-communication and reciprocal support. The use of a network as an instrument greatly increases the opportunities for meetings and/or comparisons between isolated workers engaged in promoting innovations and representatives of the decision-making centres of the formal education system (technical officials).

(ii) The designing and application, in respect of each country, of a strategy of attack by "entry points"(1) into the national education system which will lay emphasis on the role of decision-making centres within the formal system in the planning and execution of innovative educational activities, and, concurrently, encouragement of the activities of groups of educators and researchers working outside the formal system by means of experimental activities and the dissemination of information thereon.

(iii) In co-ordination with individual national decision-making centres, the selection and training of national specialists who are willing and able to take part in the Network's activities.

(iv) Making available the resources and the potential of national education systems for use in accordance with the main lines of the development of the subregion, organizing them in such a way that they will help to solve the two basic problems involved, namely rural underdevelopment and unemployment, in the context of the innovations generated by the Project's activities.

The institutional structure established(2) by joint agreement between the six governments, UNDP and Unesco, corresponded with the assumptions, guiding ideas and strategies described above:

an administrative policy level, consisting of the Central American Educational Co-ordination Office (CEC) for the purpose of assessing, at the periodical meetings of the Ministers of Education of the six countries of the region, the Project's programme of work, in the light of the progress reports submitted by the Director of the Project and of the specific evaluations and requests formulated by each national delegation. At the start of the Project this policy level was represented by the Ministers of Education alone, the idea being that Ministers of Planning (who were co-signatories of the Network Project on behalf of the participating governments), should be included subsequently, thus reflecting the broad concept of a national "education sector" which would bring together all decision-making centres and all education workers whether belonging to the formal State education system or not;

a technical level, consisting of a Multilateral Technical Commission (CTM), composed of officials from the six ministries of education, which was also planned to include representatives from other public bodies (governmental or otherwise) involved in the education sector. The function of the Commission is to conduct a continuing analysis of the specific problems of education in each country, make a critical study of the solutions suggested by each country, and identify and organize mutual assistance activities (the establishment of information networks, projects or

(1) By "entry points" is meant areas or themes for action at the levels of formal education subsystems (educational projects and programmes), administrative and supporting subsystems (planning, social research, etc.) and other subsystems or socio-educational groups which have more chance of freeing the operation of the education system from the grip of routine, and of promoting exchanges on innovative practices and ideas.

(2) See Annex I..

institutions of interest to all, etc.). The Commission acts as the programming body for the Project, following and supervising the Network's activities, and also as a sounding-board for the priorities and views of ministries of education (and as necessary of the representatives of other sectors). Its members participate in its work on a part-time basis, and are at the same time National Co-ordinators for the Project's activities in their own countries. The hierarchical levels of delegates vary widely from one country to another, and at present the membership of CTM includes deputy ministers and directors-general.

An operational level, consisting of the Network as such, the participants in each country, working groups, the communication machinery, the methodological instruments devised for the "entry points" into each country's education system, etc. (See Annex I for the detailed organizatal chart of institutions).

After the initial period of preparatory activities, which made it possible to carry out a preliminary critical assessment, draw up a strategy in agreement with the six participating countries, and organize the institutional structure, work began in 1976 with the following objectives in view:

(a) an investigation, with the team of international advisers, of the problems identified in the preparatory phase;

(b) the establishment and consolidation of the Network as such;

(c) activities for the exchange of national specialists among the countries of the region.

These objectives involved three types of activities:

the use of the technical and human resources of the education systems of the region, (mostly formal systems) and the organization of a network of inter-communication and mutual assistance among them;

the start of the activities of the CEC's Multilateral Technical Commission (CTM), composed of officials of the six ministries of education, as the body responsible for programming and following the activities of the Network;

the actual operational activities, conducted at the level of the Network itself, with national participants, working groups, etc.

These activities were developed in connection with priority subprojects selected by countries and CEC in the light of the analysis of the limiting factors identified during the first phase of the project. The subprojects assigned priority[1] at that time were:

(i) continuing training for teachers of basic education;

(ii) the training of educational administrators;

(iii) the nuclear planning of educational facilities;

(iv) short courses and vocational training;

(v) the testing and development, in co-operation with Unicef, of a methodology of participatory research into the basic educational needs of six villages in the region.

(1) See Annex II for the organization of the "entry points" for each subproject.

In addition, new activities of a more marked interdisciplinary nature were gradually introduced, as made necessary by the development of earlier subprojects or by requests for advisory services from CEC and its member countries. Particular importance was attached to activities relating to:

(vi) curriculum development;

(vii) socio-economic indicators, as a basis for educational planning and the critical analysis of the actual situation as an instrument for training purposes;

(viii) support for the Central American Socio-Educational Information and Documentation System;

(ix) the research project on the position of organized groups in Central American countries vis-à-vis the education system and the educational innovations emerging in the region.

In addition to these operations at regional level, national activities were carried out under the Project in response to specific requests from CEC member countries for technical advice or training.(1)

(1) Below are some examples:

Costa Rica: technical and financial co-operation with PRONACAFS (in-service training programme for educational administrators);

El Salvador: co-operation with ODEPOR (Planning and Organization Office) in a study of the system of administrative decentralization and the provision of advisory services to the Alberto Masferrer Teacher Training College concerning the methodology for evaluating training programmes for teachers of basic education;

Guatemala: co-operation in planning and research in respect of the national programme for out-of-school education, co-operation with USIPE (Educational Research and Planning Unit) in its administrative development, studies for restructuring the national teacher-training college system, and support to NUFED groups ("Nucleos Familiares Educativos para el Desarrollo";

Honduras: provision of advisory services to the National Autonomous University of Honduras in connection with the introduction of a post-graduate course in economics, to PRONAEEH (the out-of-school education programme) on research into basic educational needs, and to the Francisco Morazán Higher Teacher Training College on specialized training for administrators and teachers in curriculum development and educational technology;

Nicaragua: from August 1979 onwards, support in identifying areas and problems for technical co-operation with Unesco, and in the programming of Unesco assistance, and the provision of direct advisory services;

Panama: co-operation with ICASE (Central American Institute of Educational Administration and Supervision, University of Panama) in its annual training courses for planners and administrators, the provision of advisory services to the National Directorate for Teacher Training and the training of teachers in basic production cycles.

For the phase of conceptual development and personnel training, which began in the second half of 1978, the objectives were as follows:

(a) the strengthening and expansion of the Network as an instrument of mutual co-operation between the six countries;

(b) dissemination of the policy guidelines of the Project developed as a result of the preceding activities.

Project operations were concentrated on three main areas:

the critical analysis of actual socio-economic conditions in the region in relation to the educational situation, making combined use for this purpose of the participatory investigations at local level and macro-socio-economic research techniques (indicators), as a basis for the training of human resources and for orienting, planning and evaluating school and out-of-school education systems.

the renewal of learning processes, by developing and making experimental use - in the light of the individual needs of each country - of procedures for curriculum development and providing training and further training for educational personnel and organizations involved in the provision of school or out-of-school education, so as to relate educational content, the qualifications of education workers, their working methods, and educational processes and techniques, with the needs and interests of students and the socio-economic reality of the milieu;

educational planning and administration, by developing and making experimental use of systems for training administrators and procedures for planning and decentralized administration based on the analysis of the socio-economic situation and the new learning processes.

5. The present state of the Network Project: results and trends

In the course of its development the Project has combined various types of activities geared to a variety of technical co-operation situations. It has thus demonstrated the great advantage to be derived from providing a flexible and varied range of technical co-operation resources in response to national or local educational requirements. This has made it possible to identify four types of situations in which co-operation is established under the Project with national educational authorities and national or sub-regional educational institutions:

main advisory activities, deriving from the three central themes identified in 1978, and designed to contribute to the conceptual and methodological development of the Project by providing a basis for training the national groups participating therein, with a view to building up a Central American force for innovative work in the educational field. These activities, which have linked together various subprojects of the Project, have benefited from the continuing advice and co-ordination of a group of technicians from the Project's central team. (This category includes the participatory research into basic educational needs in six villages.)

reinforcement activities, providing direct support within the policy framework of the Project to national groups engaged in specific activities (for example, technical co-operation with the Government of Costa Rica in planning a lifelong education system).

supporting activities, designed to establish institutional facilities and procedures for disseminating the results of the Project and making the best possible use of them. (This category includes the provision of advisory services to CEC in developing a socio-educational information and documentation system in the region.);

mutual co-operation activities, conducted directly between the countries of the region (exchanges of specialists), which have provided an opportunity for more than 500 Central American specialists to work together in seminars and workshops, and on advisory and observation missions (see Table 7 annexed, showing exchanges between the six countries in 1979).

The "flow" of personnel and ideas generated by the Project between education authorities and specialists in all six countries has been organized gradually on the basis of the original conceptual and operational guidelines supplemented by new lines of emphasis that have been developed and which together form the Project's current co-operation framework. These guidelines represent an outline of what might eventually, when the project comes to an end, constitute the common heritage of all the groups (education authorities and institutions, organized groups, universitites) concerned in the educational "task", within the context of the renewal and democratization of Central American education systems.

Among the main conceptual and operational guidelines which could serve as the frame of reference for the expansion of the Project in its second phase, the following are most worthy of note:

(a) the dissemination of an integrated concept of education as an intervening variable in, and indicator of, overall social development; making national participants thoroughly aware of the importance of this concept, and inculcating professional attitudes in them in keeping with it;

(b) the gradual association of widely varying sectors of national life in reflection concerning education and in educational activities, which are certainly no longer the exclusive concern of ministries of education but involve, in addition, sectors such as economic planning, agriculture, health and community development, as well as universities, non-governmental bodies and organized groups at the community level or concerned with productive activities;

(c) the strengthening of the operational character of the Project so as to make possible direct experiments in the field;

(d) the growing use of national technical specialists in direct assistance activities at national or subregional levels;

(e) the search for a genuine interrelation between subprojects (themes and fields of action), which is producing an increasingly clear understanding on the part of the various educational workers and authorities of the need for interdisciplinary approaches within education systems as a starting-point for activities which will also be interdisciplinary and intersectoral;

(f) the increasing influence of social, economic and technological analyses on the Project's investigations and activities;

(g) the extension of the Project beyond the region, through the gradual establishment of networks of educational exchanges between the subregion and other regions having comparable situations and problems (the Caribbean, Latin America, Africa, etc.).

As regards the main lines of educational policy that can be seen by the countries of the region to have emerged from the development of Project RLA/72/100 from 1975 onwards, mention may be made of the following; these might also provide a starting-point for the future activities of the Project:

(i) an increase in the democratization of education, i.e. the provision of fuller educational opportunities for all;

(ii) the stimulation of innovative educational experiments;

(iii) the formulation of intersectoral educational policies;

(iv) the integration of education with overall development plans;

(v) the formulation of educational plans on the basis of research into the problems, needs and future development of the milieu concerned, including all its variables;

(vi) recognition of the importance of non-formal education, both in itself and as one of the most effective channels for the integral reform of education systems;

(vii) the development of a new conception of basic education, no longer viewed merely as one of the conventional levels of the education system, but considered basically as the type and quality of education to which every individual is entitled, regardless of his group, age or social origin;

(viii) a trend towards broadening the sources from which personnel are recruited for the education sector.

(ix) expansion of the systems for the training, in-service training and further training of educational personnel, as part of their continuing education throughout their career.

6. Conclusions and future lines of action (for the second phase of the Project)(1)

During the period 1975-1979 improvements in education in the six countries were not appreciable, judging from indicators such as:

the budget for the education sector (constantly declining over the last five years as a proportion of the national budget, in five out of the six countries),

illiteracy, which instead of decreasing, has increased in the countries most seriously affected;

the relations between the State and the teaching profession which, with rare exceptions, are continually worsening.

In contrast, then, to the idea of integrating Central American education promoted, until this idea failed, by the Organization of Central American States, Project RLA/72/100 has been instrumental in encouraging a gradual move towards the concept of integrating knowledge and reflexion concerning the whole complex of socio-eduational problems,(2) though notable differences can be observed in the level and extent of integration as between the separate groups participating in the Network Project (groups of technicians and administrators in State systems, groups of researchers and/or educators working in non-governmental structures, universities, population groups, etc.).

(1) The Project is being extended from 1 January 1980, under the same title, but with a new code number (RLA/79/062).

(2) By "socio-educational" is meant everything related to education, seen as a dependent and/or intervening variable in all aspects of the actual situation at a given time.

At the same time, recent socio-political events in the Central American region are giving a new dimension to this "common market" of reflection on socio-educational problems, particularly through the introduction in Nicaragua of a rapid and far-reaching process of educational reform which is accompanied by an overall process of socio-economic change.

As a result, the picture presented by the educational situation in the region, characterized by, on the one hand:

great quantitative and qualitative needs;

a keener awareness and openness to discussion at the level of those professionally involved in education, of the need to change educational priorities, content and methods;

and on the other:

an acquired capital of practical experience in the field, and of concepts, instruments, a permanent communication and information system, and well-trained human resources;

the existence in the region of examples of educational renewal promoted by the State;

makes it necessary and feasible to ensure the practical application and extension of the results of Project RLA/72/100, with greater participation by the countries involved, to be reflected both in a financial commitment and in the more effective integration (provision for this being made in institutional structures) of Project activities with the activities of national groups concerned with the renewal and democratization of education.

Now that the first phase of the Network Project is coming to an end, there appears to be a genuine basis of co-operation which can be expressed in a number of considerations justifying the strategic options for the second phase.

Educational needs in the region, and its state of economic and social development, particularly as regards the least privileged groups, create a situation in which action by the Network Project has been not only appropriate but also urgent and necessary. It may be considered that its objective is ambitious in relation to the available resources, since it is obvious that it is not so much a question of increasing the amount of education provided, as of meeting the continuing need for equality of access to education for all the peoples of Central America, as a means of solving the grave problems facing the governments of the region, i.e., basically, rural subdevelopment and unemployment.

This Project approach, set out in the initial document in January 1976, has not varied with subsequent revisions. While the main objective has remained the same, the strategy for action is a changing one, so that it may be geared to specific situations.

With this in mind, during the three years of the existence of the Network Project a considerable number of activities have been carried out in respect of research, advisory services, exchanges, study groups and meetings and the preparation of programmes, most of which have been very successful; their practical repercussions have however, been limited. In the next phase of the Project, therefore, although studies and experiments should not be abandoned, a strategy of widespread activities should be applied designed to ensure that the participating governments, which in most cases have approved the innovations resulting from the Project and expressed their decision to implement them, do, in fact, put them into practice.

The criteria worked out in the course of Project RLA/72/100, on the basis of adequately tested technical principles, make it possible to prepare for large-scale activities by way of personnel training (teachers and administrators), the restructuring of organizations (ministries, decentralization, nuclear planning) and improving the content of education and teaching activities (curriculum development, information, identification of basic educational needs, etc.).

While it is recognized that the execution of such a programme does not come directly within the sphere of the Project, but is the responsibility of the national authorities, the aim must be to find a way to demonstrate to those authorities the desirability of putting into practice the criteria and material results obtained in recent years.

Adopting an operational approach, and with the aim of catering for the mass of the people, the Project will lay emphasis on the philosophy of education which has been developed during the first phase thanks to the contributions by national, subregional and international participants, based on:

the principle of participation by the people concerned in the identification of their educational needs and the content and types of education appropriate to meet these needs;

a close relationship between the participatory process and the analysis of the factors in the socio-economic, technological and cultural context which have an influence on educational options;

the identification of education in Central America with innovative trends promoted by groups and institutions both within and outside formal education systems;

permanent dialogue on the subject of these principles with the key personnel and administrators of education systems, with a view to developing a common language in respect of the educational task.

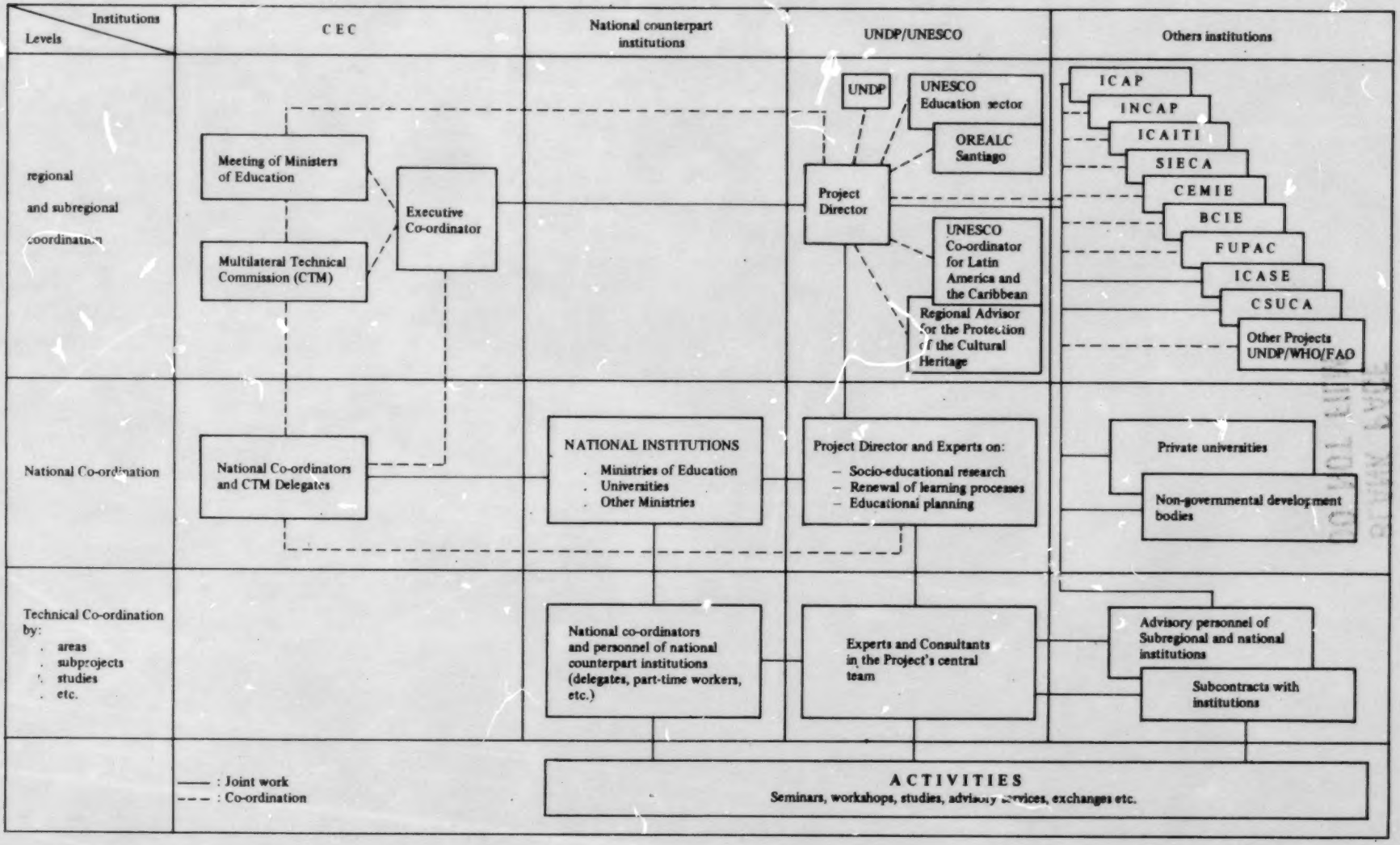
The Project as a whole will promote Technical Co-operation among Developing Countries (TCDC), since all its achievements are the fruit of continuing co-operation between national workers in the six participating countries and the central team of international advisers, which acts in this case as a catalyst.

Lastly, in its next phase, the Network Project will, in collaboration with ministries of education, promote the establishment or strengthening of national machinery for seeking international sources of finance for education; it will also, at the request of the government concerned, assist or supervise the preparation of projects for which financial support is required.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART OF INSTITUTIONS

1979

Annex 1



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ANNEX II

Subprojects and entry points

Subprojects	Entry points: Problems	Entry points: Solutions studied in the different countries
Primary school teacher training	Poor use of the human resources of the community; Lack of adaptation of educational personnel to the socio-cultural environment; Lack of continuity between pre- and in-service training.	Diversification of recruitment of primary teachers; Use of personnel other than teachers; Systems for continuing training, doing away with the initial academic type of training (teacher-training colleges) and using the concept of training modules by objectives.
Training of educational administrators	Recruitment of administrators almost exclusively from the teaching profession; Bureaucratic and hierarchical, rather than functional, concept of the administrator; Lack of adaptation of administrative personnel to the diversity of techniques used in the education system; Difficulty of adapting the educational administrator to out-of-school educational activities.	Diversification of recruitment of administrators (technical personnel from outside the teaching profession, community leaders, etc.); Critical analysis of standards for the recruitment and training of administrators, in the light of the tasks to be performed; Decentralization of public administration; A system of continuing training based on the concept of training modules by objective, making possible considerable horizontal and vertical mobility among administrators.
Nuclear planning of education	Insufficient schools to cover the region; Lack of connection between educational activities and the productive activities of the community.	Integration of educational establishments, and non-formal activities with an educational content, into a so-called "nuclear" group; Pooling of the educational resources of the various development bodies working at community level.

Short courses and technical vocational training	The desire to acquire qualifications (social pressures);	Short courses (at the secondary and higher levels);
	The low esteem in which technical education is held;	Pilot studies on the demand by the labour market and on the structural and cultural relations between the "world of education" and the "world of work".
	The mismatch between the quantitative and qualitative demand by the labour market and the supply from the education system;	
	Educational guidance provided solely in towns and for an elite.	